

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 3C5 FDSC APPLIED AND MEDICAL SCIENCES (NETWORK)

9 April 2019

PRESENT: Mrs Ursula Quinn, Senior Lecturer, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Ulster University Business School (Chair)
Dr Patrick Murphy, Lecturer, Department of Biology, University of York
Professor Stephen McClean, Associate Head of School of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster University
Dr Steven Patterson, Lecturer in Biological Sciences, Glasgow Caledonian University
Mr Howard Wright, Lecturer in History and Theory of Applied Arts, Belfast School of Art, Ulster University
Mr Curtis Gillespie, Student representative

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Jerome Marley, Faculty Partnership Manager (Biomedical and Environmental Sciences), Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster University
Ms D Troy, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The panel was convened to consider the following provision.

- FdSc Applied Medical Sciences (Network)
 - North West Regional College - NWRC (Derry/Londonderry)
 - Northern Regional College - NRC (Newtownabbey)
 - South West College - SWC (Enniskillen)
 - Southern Regional College - SRC (Newry)

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. QAA subject benchmark statements for Foundation Degree Characteristics (2015); Biosciences (2015) and Biomedical Science (2015).
4. Preliminary comments from Faculty Partnership Manager (CA4) and Panel members (CA7).

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Background and Rationale

The Panel met with a group of senior representatives from all four colleges involved in the Network and asked them to outline why and how the network had been established, how it has evolved and where they see it placed in the future. The Team advised that the network had originally been set up in 2008 by Southern Regional College (SRC) and North West

Regional College primarily in response to a request from Norbrook for a course to train its staff. South West College (SWC), Northern Regional College (NRC) and South Eastern Regional College (SERC) joined the network at a later date, however, SERC had now withdrawn and would no longer offer the course. Ulster University had also been involved from the outset. There was clear demand for this course across each of the regional college areas for students coming from school who wish to progress to employment or for those wishing to progress to further university study. This course was delivered full-time across the network but was also part-time at NWRC only. It was noted that a FdSc in Applied and Industrial Sciences was offered at SWC, however, was delivered primarily for students employer funded through a higher level apprenticeship (HLA).

3.2 Enrolment and marketing

The Senior Team recognised the challenges in terms of numbers and noted the recent downturn in enrolments but advised the Panel of the various initiatives currently underway to try to address these issues, including increased engagement with alumni and local schools.

It was the view that there remained a strong interest for the course across all campuses and that the results of their efforts would transfer into enrolments in 2019/20. The members of the network met regularly as a team and worked very successfully together through a strong personal and professional relationship which had been built up over the years that the programme had been running.

Strategically, the course was very important and now that the council areas were larger geographically, colleges were working collaboratively with their local council and employers to increase science provision in particular. Life Sciences was also a priority area in both the NI Skills Barometer and the STEM agenda. The network provided a very strong geographical spread across the province and the course complemented and supplemented the other higher education provision offered by each college.

3.3 Progression

The progression opportunities from the FdSc Applied Medical Sciences were widespread. It offered successful students a progression route to a range of courses at Ulster University and in particular articulating to year 2 the BSc Hons Biomedical Science. Progression or entry to different stages of other Ulster courses such as physiotherapy or pharmacy were also options available to these students.

3.4 Network

The main strengths of the network were the cohesiveness of the course team and how staff worked collaboratively in terms of curriculum development, design and sharing of good practice. A good system of cross-marking was also utilised across colleges. The only weakness identified was the travel between campuses but this could be overcome through the use of technology and online meetings, for example.

Equity of student experience across colleges was ensured through a high level of student support as well as shared use of resources and specialised equipment, for example, students were invited to other colleges to gain experience of the mass spectrometer at NWRC. This sharing of practice and resource was only possible as a result of the network. Overall, the network worked through a very strong collaborative approach with constant review both at individual and overall team level.

3.5 Employer Engagement

The Panel enquired how the development of the curriculum was informed by stakeholder engagement. The Team advised that issues would be identified by the Work Based Learning co-ordinators who would be in regular contact with industry and employer mentors. Industry related assessment was also encouraged through projects and live case studies. All colleges had a very strong profile in terms of stakeholder engagement in their respective local areas and this was also supplemented by staff's own professional development activity.

Going forward, the Panel enquired if any consideration could be given to using this programme to underpin a HLA. This was a possibility, however, funding may be an issue coupled with challenges in some areas geographically in the number of apprenticeship opportunities that would be available for students.

The Team advised that the number of students not wishing to progress to University after A-Level was increasing and a course such as this provided an alternative way to progress. The significant number of unconditional offers in other parts of the UK had significantly impacted on intakes to this and other similar courses.

3.6 HEA Fellowship

The Panel enquired if any staff were pursuing HEA fellowship and was advised that this was an area being developed by many colleges as part of their staff development plans to encourage staff to progress through the grades of fellowship.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel received written comments from students on the course at SRC, NWRC and SWC and met with a group of students from NRC, as the college at which the meeting was being held.

There was a consensus of views across the network and for most students the course had exceeded expectations. During discussions the following were highlighted.

- The high level of support provided by staff including guidance on academic writing and referencing and carrying out research and using the VLE. Academic aspects had initially been a challenge, however, students had very much benefitted from extensive the support provided.
- NWRC also had a Maths Cube which provided additional support for students.
- Staff were very approachable and helpful and could be contacted by email to address issues or would organise a face to face meeting.
- No issues were reported in relation to resources to support the programme.
- Students had found some subjects a challenge, in particular, chemistry but many of the more challenging subjects were also the most interesting.
- Students had come onto the course from a range of backgrounds including from A-Level having not been successful in gaining direct entry to University, and also from Access courses.
- Students had found this course a great preparation for University study and were now of the view that this had been a much better option than going directly to undergraduate study and one which they would definitely recommend to others.
- All students raised the scheduling challenges as a result of the number of assessment submissions in semester one, however, was advised that this was now addressed in the revised programme. Furthermore, the module, Change Management which students viewed as unchallenging, had also been removed from the programme which was very much welcomed by students.

- Some noted repetition of basic laboratory practical exercises which they felt were unnecessary.
- Work based learning was a key aspect of the course and provided opportunities to gain experience in industry and develop employability skills. Those who had already undertaken placement spoke very highly of the experience.
- Students were satisfied with the preparation for and support during work based learning although some comments noted difficulties in having to source a placement in some areas where the number of potential employers was fewer.
- Students were provided with support in relation to preparation of CVs, interview preparation, and career/study progression opportunities.
- The course was an excellent gateway to a number of different courses at Ulster and progression to further study was the main aim of most students.
- This course was not generally signposted by schools as a post A-Level option but should be as it was an excellent progression route to a wide range of opportunities and developed skills in preparation for University study.
- Students would be willing to act as programme ambassadors with their former school in promoting the course and some had already been approached in this regard.
- Some students reported that assessment submission was in hard copy only but that that VLE was used in other ways.
- Feedback was adequate and provided through written comments or verbally through one to one individual meetings and within two weeks of submission.
- The level of public engagement or involvement in civic outreach activity was limited, however, would be welcomed and would enhance employability whilst raising the profile of the course.
- On completion of the course, most students were hoping to progress to a course at Ulster University.

The following were suggested in relation to possible future developments:

- An increase in the number of opportunities with regard to research as part of assessment;
- More medical related content;
- Opportunities to engage with students from across the network as one group.

The Panel thanked the students for their enthusiasm and engagement and wished them well in their future studies and career.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAMS

5.1 Curriculum Design

The Panel asked the Team to outline how they had approached revalidation and the curriculum redesign process. The Team reported that the process had commenced two years previously with meetings involving staff from across the network and Ulster staff to discuss alignment with Ulster's curriculum design framework. Consultation with and feedback from stakeholders including employers, current students and graduates had also informed the new curriculum. It had been a very collaborative approach, supported by the Faculty Partnership Manager.

There was agreement across the whole network on the revisions required to the curriculum to ensure that students had a mix of theoretical and practical and developed the skillset to progress either to further study or directly to employment. The network displayed a very strong community of practice through regular communication, shared resources and expertise.

In the future, it was hoped that progression from the course could expand to other routes at Ulster or elsewhere to further enhance the existing diverse range of pathways to which a student could currently progress.

When asked, the Team advised that the greatest success of the course to date was student satisfaction and seeing them succeed and progress.

5.2 Recruitment

The Panel enquired as to the recruitment strategy and was advised that marketing was undertaken on an individual college basis and each used their own approach. For some it was in-house as a progression from Level 3 courses as well as students coming from A-Level or Access courses. This involved a range of activity including college open nights, information sessions, Science and Technology Fairs, involvement in the NI Science Festival and liaising with schools to promote the course as a post-A Level option. The Team recognised that this course was not widely promoted in schools and activities were being stepped up across the network to increase awareness of this programme in schools as a very viable progression alternative to University. It was hoped that this activity would show an increase in numbers in the next academic year.

The Panel noted that although this course was delivered through a network, there appeared to be some disparity in areas such as marketing. It was noted that no collective marketing of the course was carried out by the network as each college operated within its own individual marketing strategy and would need to be considered at a higher level. The Team assured the Panel that the college teams worked very closely and collaboratively on all aspects of the management and development of the curriculum and shared resources and practice.

The issue with part-time mode at NWRC and the very low numbers was questioned in terms of viability. The Team advised that part-time mode was not viewed simply as a fall-back option for students transferring from full-time but that it was available as an option in its own right. It was important to offer part-time to ensure that students with other commitments would be able to undertake the course around those commitments and would not be disadvantaged. It was very much aligned to the widening participation agenda, particular in some deprived areas from which colleges drew students. There were no issues in terms of resources as part-time students were co-taught with full-time with the exception of one module.

The Panel asked if any consideration had been given to aligning this course as a HLA employer funded programme. Discussion ensued with issues around funding and the differing local employer base across the different parts of the province in which the course was delivered highlighted. It could, however, be considered going forward.

The decline in numbers generally in the last academic year was noted and the Panel enquired if the Team was confident that the projected numbers were realistic. The Team advised that the previous year's decline was due to a combination of demographics and the number of conditional offers being made in other parts of the UK which had significantly impacted on recruitment. A shift in the demographic was expected this incoming year but the latter remained a challenge.

5.3 Assessment

The Panel highlighted the issue raised by students in relation to the amount of assessment in semester 1. The Team advised that overassessment had been discussed and addressed as part of the revalidation process and had been reduced overall in the revised curriculum. This would, therefore, no longer be an issue. They were always mindful of assessment scheduling and that it could be adjusted as required if any issues arose.

The Team informed the Panel that as a network they utilised a system of cross-marking and cross-moderation. There were differing approaches to online submission of assessment and provision of feedback but it was noted that the level of online submission was increased in the revised programme and all would now use Turnitin. The Team noted that it was a challenge in many cases to change students' school mind-set and encourage and develop a more independent learner.

The Panel pointed out the benefits of using the VLE both for submission of coursework and provision of feedback and recommended that the external examiner also be provided with access to each college's VLE to assist them in carrying out their role.

5.4 Retention and Progression

Student retention was generally good, however, the Team advised that chemistry had been, and continued to be, a challenge for many students coming onto the course, not least because the entry requirement for this subject was at a low level. The Level 3 module Introduction to Biology and Chemistry for Bioscience was introduced to provide students with varying knowledge in the subject with a sound introduction to the subject at the start of the course.

The Panel noted the very high percentage of students progressing to an Ulster programme and the diversity of programmes to which students could progress which was to be commended.

5.5 Work Based Learning

The Team advised that quality assurance of work based learning was undertaken at individual college level, however, each had in place a formal process of which employers, students and lectures were fully made aware. A separate handbook setting out the process, requirements and expectations for each of the three parties was provided at the outset. The process was monitored and supported throughout.

5.6 Modules

The duplication of practical work raised by students was confirmed as having been addressed in the revised course but if any laboratory work appeared to be duplicated, it would be at a more advanced level, building on the previous.

Evidence Based Professional Practice had been reviewed and was now at Level 5, and built on the year 1 module Scientific Communication, Maths and Statistics for Bioscience. The challenge was to reinforce and emphasise the use of trusted sources and for students to recognise those which were not. The Evidence Based Practice module also allowed students to focus on their own particular area of interest.

5.7 Creativity, innovation and good practice

The Panel enquired what was done to encourage creativity, innovation and sharing of good practice in the course and was advised that this was embedded throughout. Assessment was concerned with the evaluation of results and being able to solve problems and suggest alternatives. Science very much involved creativity and innovation and all colleges were now involved in project based learning. Work based learning also provided opportunities for students to be creative and innovative through their work role and in the individual case study.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

- i) The quality of the documentation;
- ii) The collegiate approach of the Network, including cross-college moderation;
- iii) The high level of student satisfaction – the students are very strong advocates of the programme;
- iv) The very evident encouragement and support that exists among staff to support and guide learning and development, and career progression;
- v) Work based learning opportunities and the high level of engagement with employers across the Network;
- vi) The exceptionally high level of progression not only to the directly mapped Ulster programme, but also to other programmes at Ulster;
- vii) The strength of partnership between the Network and the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences evidenced by the preparation for revalidation and redesign of the curriculum.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the programme be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2019/20 to 2023/24 inclusive)* subject to the conditions and recommendations of the Panel being addressed and a satisfactory response and a revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office **by 21 May 2019** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

**It was noted that the new NRC Coleraine location was not approved as part of this revalidation as it had not received University approval to proceed. A CA3 process would be undertaken separately for consideration of this proposed new location.*

Minimum and maximum intakes recommended by Faculty

College	Mode of Attendance	2019/20 Min/Max	2020/21 Min/Max	2021/22 Min/Max	2022/23 Min/Max	2023/24 Min/Max
NWRC	FT	15/20	15/20	15/20	15/20	15/20
	PT	5/10	5/10	5/10	5/10	5/10
SWC Enniskillen	FT	15/20	15/20	15/20	15/20	15/20
NRC N'Abbey	FT	15/15	15/15	15/15	15/15	15/15
SRC Newry	FT	15/15	15/15	15/15	15/15	15/15

Conditions

- i) That all issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the panel report are addressed;

Strong Recommendation

- i) That the Network develop a clear marketing strategy for the programme to increase full-time numbers across all campuses and part-time at NWRC, and as part of this to engage students as programme ambassadors (sections 3.2 and 5.2 refer);

Recommendations

- i) To keep the assessment schedule under review to avoid 'bunching' of submission deadlines (sections 4 and 5.3 refer);
- ii) To explore further the implementation of Ulster's Electronic Management of Assessment policy to ensure alignment with Ulster practices (sections 4 and 5.3 refer);
- iii) To identify a means of developing a 'Maths Cube' model currently used at NWRC, across the Network (sections 3.4 and 4 refer).

7 APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Panel, in particular, the external members, and the Course Teams for their valuable contribution to the revalidation process.

DT 10.04.19